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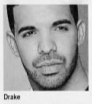

Drake

Drake announces summer tour

Drake's summer is shaping up to be a busy one. The Hotline Bling rapper has announced plans for a 32-date North American tour timed to the release of his new album, Views from the 6, due on Friday. The Summer Sixteen Tour will be headlined by the Toronto-born performer and Atlanta-based rapper Future. The tour will make three stops in Canada, including one in Toronto on July 21 and Vancouver Sept. 17. A third date, also in Toronto, is slated for Aug. 1 as part of Drake's annual OVO Fest.

Sutherland joins Cannes jury

Canadian actor Donald Sutherland has joined the jury for this year's Cannes Film Festival. Canadians in the Cannes lineup include Quebec director Xavier Dolan, whose film Juste la fin du monde (It's Only the End of the World) will be in competition for the prestigious Palme d'Or award. Montreal director Kim Nguyen's film Two Lovers and a Bear and Mean Dreams from Toronto's Nathan Morlando will be part of the Directors' Fortnight.

Mrs. Jones singer dies at 81

Billy Paul, a jazz and soul singer best known for the No. 1 hit ballad Me and Mrs. Jones, has died. He was 81. Paul, whose career spanned for more than 60 years, died Sunday, April 24 at his home in Blackwood, N.J., said his co-manager, Beverly Gay. Born Dec. 1, 1934, Paul, had been diagnosed recently with pancreatic cancer, Gay said.

Evan Solomon lands new gig

Former CBC host Evan Solomon has a new gig at 580 CFRA News Talk Radio in Ottawa. Bell Media Radio says Solomon is taking on the newly created role of national affairs specialist at the station, where he is already host and executive producer of Ottawa Now. He'll also host the new syndicated weekend program Real Talk. He anchored the CBC News Network's series Power & Politics and CBC Radio's The House until last summer. CBC dismissed Solomon after the Toronto Star alleged he took advantage of his position to broker lucrative art deals between a friend and wealthy interview subjects. Solomon denied any wrongdoing.

Parton to tour North America

Singer/songwriter Dolly Parton has announced her largest North American tour in more than two decades. The tour begins June 3 in Greensboro, N.C., the same city where Bruce Springsteen cancelled a show to protest that state's new laws that many consider discriminate against the LGBT community. Additional dates will be announced soon, which includes her first trek into Canada in more than two decades.

Prince, at Montreal's Metropolis in June 2011, embodied every point on the pop-music spectrum and beyond. GAZETTE FILES

ALWAYS PROGRESSING, NEVER COMPROMISING

Even to a listener with steadfast boomer appetites, Prince had an artistic impact

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

As an inveterate baby boomer, inevitably dragging former glory days through the fog of memory, I came to consider Prince the first non-boomer artist I adored as much as my contemporary heroes.

I admired the uncompromising stance summarized by the man's famous multi-sexual symbol. If pop music is primarily wrapped in sexuality — and not necessarily politics, as some in my misguided folk-rock cohort dogmatically insisted — then Prince, like James Brown the sex machine before him, was its apotheosis. Sexuality, according to Prince, was more like a pop philosophy: vigorous, graceful, empathetic, existential, flamboyant, the pleasure principle writ large.

The night before Prince's death last week, I was watching a 1993 BBC documentary on another rock genius who died too young: Frank Zappa. While they were radically different, Prince and Zappa also shared an amazing number of similarities.

"Without deviation from the norm, progress is not possible," Zappa said that, but it could just as well have been Prince.

Prince shared with Zappa the desire to unyoke himself from the power of record industry executives and enjoy complete control over the release of his music. (And they both took on the same conglomerate: Warner Bros.)

As songwriters, they both traded in sex: Zappa with coolly outrageous irony, Prince with throbbing warm heart. Even his notorious song Darling Nikki had a certain tenderness. The song inspired the formation, by politicians' wives, of the Parents Music Resource Center, which called for labelling of "explicit content." At Senate hearings on the issue, Zappa was the most articulate, forceful defender of artists' right of expression, singling out Prince.

The fan reaction to Prince's death seemed more personal, more grief stricken — a death in the family — than that following the demise of his contemporary rival Michael Jackson. Such was the great humanity of Prince: despite all the hoopla surrounding his career, he was still very much of this world, unlike Jackson.

He was arguably the first non-boomer artist to emerge from the Fab Four's long shadow with an incalculable artistic impact. As a boomer, I followed his music intently, hooked by his multi-talkinous genre-busting talents. Prince was important, to my eyes and ears, because he was a musician first, and his value system took its cues from music you couldn't make into mere generational formula.

He was everything pop encompasses — from bouncy to melodramatic — and beyond. Beyond Category, the title of a 1993 Duke Ellington biography by John Edward Hasse, could easily be the title of a book on Prince. Like Ellington, his personal musical style embraced myriad other styles. Isn't it impossible to be "personal" with such a limitless mix? Not in the hands of Duke and Prince.

The rock-critic establishment has had great difficulty distinguishing quality from the social phenomena surrounding a pop sensation, ever since the Beatles' curdled smorgasbord Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. Because Prince was no longer a phenomenon by 1999, critics thought his music somehow wasn't as good as it was in his chart-topping days.

But in an age when we're hooked on trending, Facebook likes and other manifestations of online conformity, Prince was uncompromising. His sound remained richly synthetic, born not only of a searing guitar but also of the plump tones he coaxed from synthesizers and other electric keyboards.

> *He was a musician first, and his value system took its cues from music you couldn't make into mere generational formula.*

Premature deaths of entertainers have been given wall-to-wall coverage since the passing of movie idol Rudolph Valentino in 1926 attracted tens of thousands to funerals in New York and Los Angeles. But as forms of media have expanded in the Internet age, so have the forms of coverage and the ability to share grief.

The New Yorker, ever eager to capture the zeitgeist, revealed its cover-page tribute for this week's issue — an illustration of purple raindrops by Bob Staake — just hours after Prince's death on Thursday. On the publication's website, Matthew Trammell wrote that Prince leaves behind "one of the handful of pop legacies whose broadness cannot be simplified in even its most romantic, famous moments, and now we must work to enjoy and adore that legacy as it warrants."

On Twitter and Facebook, Bono said in typically grandiose style: "I never met Mozart, I never met Duke Ellington or Charlie Parker. I never met Elvis. But I met Prince."

When was the last time the president of the United States issued an official statement like this? "Few artists have influenced the sound and trajectory of popular music more distinctly, or touched quite so many people with their talent.... Prince did it all. Funk, R&B, Rock and roll. He was a virtuoso instrumentalist, a brilliant bandleader and an electrifying performer."

Obama unfortunately left out "jazz" in that list of genres. In his 1989 autobiography, Miles Davis wrote that Prince made "the most exciting music I was hearing in 1982.... Here was someone who was doing something different, so I decided to keep an eye on him."

Jazz was in Prince's blood: his parents were both jazz musicians. As Davis's collaborator Marcus Miller told Pitchfork, Prince offered Davis the song Can I Play With U? for the latter's 1986 album Tutu; he ended up taking the song back, but the trumpet titan wound up including a track called Full Nelson — a play on Prince's surname. Miles called his art "social music," and Pitchfork noted that the two legendarily socialized at an unreleased recording session at Prince's Paisley Park compound in March 1986.

Prince was also one of the few artists with the fortitude to fight for his rights business-wise, including recording and publishing copyrights and putting a stop to unauthorized use of his work online. He was "the master of his own economic destiny in a way that is virtually unmatched in today's music business," the Los Angeles Times noted. "That gave him an unmatched level of control over his fate."

Last weekend, the first eight places on the iTunes album bestseller chart were occupied by Prince works. His prolific output guaranteed a treasure trove of outtakes stored in what associates dubbed The Vault. The future release of some of this music is sure to help fill out our picture of a pop genius who knew no bounds.

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